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FM AMCONSUL KOLKATA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2464
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RHMFIUU/DIA FT BELVOIR
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 3053

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KOLKATA 000256

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/INSB (BORY) AND IRF (MORALLES)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: ONE YEAR LATER, KANDHAMAL RESIDENTS REBUILD DIVIDED
COMMUNITIES

REF: 08 KOLKATA 330

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1.(SBU) Summary: One year after the killing of a popular Hindu religious leader sparked a wave of retaliatory violence in the remote, sparsely populated tribal area of Kandhamal, the situation remains calm, but tense. A visible police presence in the district has helped prevent additional violence from breaking out along tribal, ethnic or religious lines. Ninety-five percent of the 24,000 riot victims have left the relief camps, but not all have been able to return to their villages. The state government, with central financial assistance, is partnering with NGOs to distribute relief and rehabilitate villages. It has also begun investigations to address one of the underlying causes of the violence - the abuse of tribal affirmative action programs to illegally purchase land and secure employment. The government is promoting reconciliation between the tribal, primarily Hindu, Kandha and non-tribal, primarily Christian, Pana communities. Local Maoist culpability for the Hindu leader's murder makes it all the more important that the government succeed in winning over the entire population by providing security, delivering justice and developing the area in order to reduce the support and success of Maoist overtures in this district located in the "Maoist Red Corridor" in Eastern India.

12. (U) In mid-August, PolFSN traveled to Kandhamal as the first USG employee to visit the affected area since the August 2008 killings (See Reftel). The following report is based on his travel and conversations with district officials, NGO workers and community representatives.

Police and Government Presence Help Prevent Additional Violence

13. (SBU) The state government has ensured a continued police presence in the sensitive area ever since the initial, several-day delayed response to the outbreak of violence in August 2008. The visible police presence in the district has helped prevent additional violence, including during the sensitive national and state elections earlier this year. The state's top police official himself was encamped in the district headquarters to ensure that the one-year anniversary of the religious leader's death was marked without incident. According to a senior civil servant in the state's home ministry, the state is working to deliver justice to those injured or assaulted in the violence. It is pursuing the high profile cases of the religious leader's murder and the rape of the nun in fast track courts. Furthermore, an additional 600 people have been arrested and 300 have been charged for the violence that took place.

Re-building Homes and Lives in Kandhamal

¶4. (SBU) While the state government has closed down a majority of its relief camps, about 500 people (down from a one-time high of 24,000) remain in tents. PolFSN visited a camp in Nanda Giri with 52 non-tribal Christian Pana families who had fled the majority tribal Hindu village of Betticola about 15 km away. In Nanda Giri the state government is providing food and fuel for a generator, while it works to re-settle the families on government-owned land. The families told PolFSN that they cannot return to their village nor access the government's rehabilitation package since they lack proper title deeds for the property - they had apparently been living there based on verbal agreement.

¶5. (SBU) A few kilometers away in Tangna Pathar village, 22-year-old Mamta Digal and her mother are rebuilding their mob-destroyed house with national and state rehabilitation assistance supplemented by donations from NGOs and Christian organizations. The Catholic Vicar General of Bhubaneswar told PolFSN that Kandhamal still needs about 5,000 houses at USD 2,000 each. According to the senior local administration official, the housing program is proceeding slower than planned, due to delays in securing outside financial commitments.

Government Seeks to Address Underlying Cause

¶6. (SBU) The government has begun to address one of the underlying causes of the violence - the abuse of tribal affirmative action programs to illegally purchase land and secure employment. In this remote district, agriculture and government are the two largest employment sectors. While the violence may have played out along Hindu/Christian lines, it was much more a manifestation of existing tribal/ethnic grievances and animosities. Tribal Kandhas assert that ethnic Panas have inappropriately claimed or obtained tribal status from the local administration in order to purchase tribal land and apply for government jobs. Non-tribals may not purchase tribal land or

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serve in jobs reserved for tribals. The senior local administrative official told PolFSN that his office has already investigated 500 of the 800 cases regarding fake tribal certificates. The investigations have implicated more than 350 people, including senior bureaucrats and politicians.

Maoist Recruiting in Kandhamal

¶7. (SBU) Kandhamal's discontent tribal population and forested location along the so-called Maoist Red Corridor stretching from Bihar through Andhra Pradesh make it an ideal target for Maoist proliferation. According to a senior local police official, Kandhamal is one of the only Maoist-affected districts in India with no tribal support. The subsequent police interrogation of the religious leader's killers revealed that he was killed by a local group of Maoists, but without their central leaders' support. Some contacts speculate that these local Maoists, did so to send the tribes a message that only they, and not the Hindu groups, could protect tribal interests. But in doing so, the group inserted itself in the Kandha-Pana/Hindu-Christian split. During his trip PolFSN came across leaflets bearing the logos of Christian and Maoist groups exhorting Hindus and Kandha tribesmen to embrace Christianity or face death. Residents acknowledge that there may be some small overlap between the local Christian and Maoist communities, but by no means is there an official alliance.

Comment

¶8. (SBU) The government of Orissa appears to be genuinely attempting to reconcile the tribal Kandha and ethnic Pana communities in Kandhamal. The violence appears to have been driven less by religious differences and more by the underlying resentment of the ethnic Panas by the tribal Kandhas and the perceived abuses of the affirmative action system regulating jobs and property. With national and state elections behind them, politicians and bureaucrats can focus their efforts,

devoid of any election year rhetoric, on addressing their constituent needs. Maoist involvement in Kandhamal makes it all the more important that the government succeed in winning over the population by providing security, strengthening the rule of law and developing the area in order to reduce the support and success of Maoist overtures in the district.

PAYNE